

JOHN & JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (WEST PARCEL),
BUILDING NO. 18
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5383-Q

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695Q-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
JOHN AND JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (West Parcel), BUILDING 18
HABS No. PA-5383-Q

Location:

4041-4055 Ridge Avenue
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

Present Owner:

Rouse Urban Housing, Inc.
1500 Walnut Street, 19th Floor
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102

Present Occupant:

Mixed commercial and industrial tenants.

Significance:

Building 18 was built in 1919, the first and only mill building to use nationally known architects and to depart significantly from the construction techniques established in the earlier structures. Even with this departure, the architects chose to maintain the architectural vocabulary of the complex using the same materials found throughout the site, rubble walls with brick trim. Building 18 is the last building built within the period of the Dobsons' ownership.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

Date(s) of Erection:

1919 with later minor alterations. Philadelphia Building Permits list the building's construction in 1919.

Architect:

Building 18 was designed by the prominent mill and factory architects, Lockwood, Greene and Co., of Boston and Providence.

Original/Subsequent Owners:

See Chain of Title.

Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:

Unknown.

Original Plans/Construction:

Building 18 was constructed in 1919 as a rectangular, five-story stone building with large industrial windows. The building was the first in the complex to utilize modern concrete frame construction but retain the architectural vocabulary of the earlier buildings with the use of rubble walls and brick trim. The building's use during the Dobsons' tenure is undetermined.

Alterations/Additions:

In 1962 a building permit was taken out to alter the sash on Building 18. The permit specified that existing steel sash be removed and new steel sash of the same width but approximately 2' shorter in height be installed. The space under the sills was infilled with 8" of concrete block and stucco.

B. Historical Context

Building 18 is the last building to be erected on the Dobson Mill site during the tenure of the Dobsons. Shortly thereafter, in 1927, James Dobson died and in 1938, the ownership of the site transferred. The building is representative of changes in construction techniques in the early twentieth century. Its importance to the Dobson site is emphasized by the Dobsons' use of the nationally known architecture firm of Lockwood, Greene and Co.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

Architectural Character:

Building 18 differs markedly from the earlier buildings on the Dobson site by its reinforced concrete frame construction, greater height, flat roof, steel lintels and windows. Its appearance however is consistent with the other structures due to the rubble walls and brick trim employed by the architects.

Condition of Fabric:

The masonry throughout the building is in generally good condition but has been disfigured on some facades by the insertion of metal pipes and ventilation ducts.

B. Description of Exterior

Overall Dimensions:

84.2' x 100.8'

Foundations:

Reinforced concrete.

Walls:

Reinforced concrete with rubble walls and brick trim terminated by a simple brick corbel cornice and terra-cotta coping. Due to the steep changes in grade in this portion of the complex, the southern elevation is five stories in height while the remaining elevations are only four stories. There are brick fire towers located at both the south and north ends of the west and east elevations.

Structural System/Framing:

Reinforced concrete; first floor perimeter walls are unfinished concrete beams and spandrels carrying the floor structure which is concrete slab. Concrete columns which are centrally located on each floor also carry the floor structure.

Porches/Stoops/Balconies/Bulkheads:

The ground behind the north elevation of the building rises sharply and is contained behind an existing masonry retaining wall.

Chimneys:

None.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

East elevation- loading door openings have been cut (later alteration) into the window openings on the first and second floors; west elevation- south fire tower has an opening which was altered for a loading door and platform.

Windows/Shutters:

South elevation- seven window bays each with a brick soldier course at the base and cap of each opening are partially infilled with cinder block and stucco and contain a pair of replacement steel sash industrial windows capped by a steel lintel; first story windows contain single replacement central windows. East elevation- two bays with steel lintels and brick soldier courses, all have been partially or completely infilled with cinder block and stucco and contain replacement steel sash industrial windows. West elevation- two bays with steel lintels and brick soldier courses have been partially infilled with cinder block and stucco and contain replacement steel sash industrial windows. North elevation- seven window bays with steel lintels and brick soldier courses have been partially infilled with cinder block and stucco and contain replacement steel sash industrial windows; all ground story openings have been completely infilled with concrete block and stucco. In addition to the fenestration in the rubble walls, the brick fire towers located at both ends of the east and west elevations contain steel industrial sash window openings.

Roof:

The roof to the building is a low pitched built-up roof supported on wooden rafters which are carried on a grid of concrete girders and columns.

C. Description of Interior

Floor Plans:

All interior levels consist of large unpartitioned space divided by a central row of six round concrete columns. There are some modern paneled partitions on the first floor.

Stairways:

There is a brick fire tower at each corner of the building. Three of the towers house wood stairs while the fourth, the southeast tower, contains a freight elevator.

Flooring:

First floor is composed of a concrete slab. The upper floors are composed of concrete or soft wood. The wood floors are generally in poor condition.

Wall/Ceiling Finishes:

The first floor walls are unfinished concrete beams and spandrels, the upper floors are rubble walls which are exposed to the interior. Ceilings are exposed timber and planking.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

No surviving original or historic interior doors.

Windows:

All windows recessed in unornamented plaster reveals with wood plank sills.

Decorative Features and Trim:

N/A

Hardware:

Original hardware, which is no longer extant, is presumed to have been utilitarian in character.

Mechanical Equipment:

Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: See PA-5383-C for heating system, air conditioning is N/A, ventilation by window mounted fans and exterior ducts.

Lighting: Modern, strip fluorescent, ceiling mounted lighting.

Plumbing: 20th-century, ceiling mounted, sprinkler fire suppression system.

D. Site

General Setting/Orientation:

Building 18 is located in a prominent position on the northern edge of the west parcel of the Dobson site. Its primary facade faces south into the center of the complex. A steep change in grade to the rear of the building has necessitated a retaining wall behind the building.

Historic Landscape Design:

See Historic Context Section.

Outbuildings:

N/A.